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# Confucian Culture and Democratic Values: An Empirical Comparative Study in East Asia

Minxuan Huang 

Department of Political Science, Tsinghua University, Beijing, People's Republic of China  
Corresponding author. Email: [hminxuan@foxmail.com](mailto:hminxuan@foxmail.com)

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## Abstract

Many studies have been conducted on the link between Confucianism and democratic values in East Asia, but they have failed to account for the complex character of Confucianism and the possible impact of political systems. This study re-measures Confucian values into four dimensions—authoritarianism, familialism, collectivism, and harmoniousness—based on data from the fourth wave of the Asian Barometer survey. It then uses a multi-layer linear regression model to examine the relationship between the Confucian cultural values and the democratic values held by people in six East Asian societies at both the macro and micro levels. The findings demonstrate an asymmetrical pattern in the relationship between the various dimensions of Confucian cultural values and the democratic values of East Asia, collectivist values do not affect democratic values, while familial and authoritarian values have a significant and negative correlation with democratic values. Harmonious values have a significant and positive correlation with democratic values. In addition, there is a significant positive correlation between democratic institutions and the democratic values, and the relationship between the values of harmoniousness and collectivism and democratic values varies across countries with different political systems. This offers insightful material for reflection as we reconsider the connection between Confucianism and democracy in East Asia.

**Keywords:** Confucian cultural values; East Asia; Democratic values; Democratic Learning; Political Culture

Even though East Asia has made unheard-of advancements in socioeconomic growth and globalization over the past several decades, the phenomena of democratic development in the area are perplexing. In tandem with the third wave of democracy, East Asian nations and regions, including the Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, and Indonesia, have undergone political reforms that Western political scientists like Samuel Phillips Huntington have hailed as paradigms (Huntington 2012). However, the People Power Movement in the Philippines, the military coup in Thailand, and the interregional conflict in South Korea, among other recent events, have all highlighted the intricacy and detours that this region's journey to democratization takes.

Many academics and political figures have promoted Confucian values as Asian values and have engaged in heated discussions about the relationship between Confucian cultural values and democratic transformation in East Asia from various disciplinary and ideological perspectives to explain the peculiarity of development in the region. Some academics contend that Western-style free democracy conflicts with East Asian Confucian culture, which promotes deference to authority and prioritizes society, family, and communal interests (Chang, Chu, and Tsai 2005; Shi 2014). Others contend that some aspects of Confucian culture, including its emphasis on community and support for social peace, are consistent with the idea of a democratic society's evolution and can even correct some flaws in liberal democracy (Fukuyama 1995; Kim 2010; Sing 2012). Empirical researchers examine their hypotheses using various data surveys. Empirical research has frequently examined the effect of Confucian culture on citizens' attitudes toward democracy from the perspective of public opinion because democracy serves as a mechanism for converting public preferences into public policies and its legitimacy can only be solidified if it has "the consent of the people." Unfortunately, these empirical results vary (Chan 2007; Chang, Chu, and Tsai 2005; Li 2019; Nathan 2007; Sungmoon 2015). Moreover, many discussions center on the relevance or compatibility of Confucian culture and liberal democracy in East Asia. In East Asia, there is a simplistic distinction between whether Confucian cultural values are compatible or incompatible with democracy, and the thinking behind this is frequently to view Confucian culture as a homogeneous entity, neglecting the nuanced interaction between Confucian culture and democracy. This raises the questions: what is the relationship between different dimensions of Confucian cultural values and democratic values? Are there consistent relationships between the various dimensions' effects? These questions have yet to be adequately addressed.

Based on the fourth wave of The Asian Barometer Survey (ABS), this article redefines and measures Confucian values in a variety of dimensions, as well as analyzing the mechanisms by which East Asia's Confucian values influence their democratic values while exploring the relationship between the two in the context of various types of political systems.

### Arguments for Confucian Culture and Democratic Orientation

Since their emergence more than two thousand years ago, Confucian cultural values have had a strong influence in East Asia, and values such as filial piety, respect for authority, collective supremacy, and education for body cultivation have blended to form a unique political culture in this region. Scholars have been debating whether liberal democracy is suited to the East Asian area for decades. To better investigate this topic, many researchers have turned to the study of Confucian cultural traditions in the region, sparking a discussion on "Asian values," which has been split into hypotheses of incompatibility, compatibility, and convergence.<sup>1</sup>

Incompatibility hypotheses argue that different cultural types play distinct roles in the evolution of democracy, with Confucianism restricting the growth of liberal democracy, some academics have stressed the long-lasting impact of culture on social development. Languages, lifestyles, and cultural traditions of various civilizations differ significantly from one another, particularly between Asian civilizations and the

universal values of liberal democracy upheld by the West, as Huntington famously argued in his “Clash of Civilizations Theory” (Huntington 1993). Western liberal democracy and Confucianism are two distinct and incompatible philosophical philosophies, with the former emphasizing individual freedom and rights, civic engagement, and competitive political processes, and the latter emphasizing collective interests, clearly patriarchal power, and hierarchical social relations. Therefore, Confucian culture has a propensity to prevent individuals from having equal political rights and opposes the idea of separation of powers and checks and balances, and it tends to erode citizens’ perceptions of their sovereignty and the idea of political freedom (Pye 2001; Shin and Sin 2012). By examining poll data from the East Asian Barometer, some empirical scholars have furthered the argument that Confucian culture is inimical to the growth of democracy. Although traditional Confucian culture does not prohibit individuals from believing that democracy is the best form of governance, it does have a substantial impact on how democracy is viewed (Shi and Lu 2010), and those who place a higher emphasis on traditional social mores are less likely to support democracy (Chang, Chu, and Tsai 2005; Nathan and Chen 2004). Because Confucian ideals encourage authoritarian politics and devalue democracy (Park and Shin 2006), they harm support for democracy in Asian nations or areas (Chu et al. 2008).

Compatibility hypotheses claim that some aspects of Confucian culture include principles that are compatible with liberal democracy (Chan 2007; Li 2019; Sungmoon 2015). First, while having a stronger sense of work ethic than citizens in other parts of the world, East Asians have a relatively low tolerance for familialism and authoritarian tendencies, even to the level that Western democracies do (Kim 2010; Sing 2012). Furthermore, the development of public democratic standards in East Asia is not hindered by this concept of deference to and submission to parental and political authority (Dalton and Ong 2005; Fetzer and Soper 2007). Second, there is potential for convergence between traditional Confucian culture’s communalism and communal orientation and democratic growth. Confucian principles may counteract individualism’s destructive tendency in Western liberal democracy (Fukuyama 1995), and community organizations can assist in building social capital and strengthen social relationships by bringing disparate citizens together as a community. According to Putnam, social capital is one of the key drivers of democratic development, and norms of reciprocity and trust forge close ties between the government and its citizens, strengthening public confidence in and support for democratic politics (Putnam 1992). Additionally, the Confucian culture’s emphasis on social harmony encourages citizens to look beyond their limited interests, giving rise to democratic traits like tolerance and group consciousness (Fetzer and Soper 2007).

According to the convergence hypothesis, societal development will result in a confluence of Confucian culture and some democratic elements. Political culture is influenced by how politics has been practiced in a country’s history, present, and future. It is also responsive to current societal development and directly linked to the structure of government and democratic performance. According to Ronald Inglehart’s “post-modernization hypothesis” democracy’s consolidation and growth are intimately related to economic success, but they do so largely by fostering the principles of individual expression (Inglehart and Welzel 2005, 2010). In particular,

modernization promotes the successful implementation of democratic practices by enhancing the population's educational level and, therefore, cognitive ability, which promotes the creation of emancipatory values and increases the desire for liberal democracy (Welzel 2011, 2012). Although old culture is deeply ingrained, citizens will eventually adjust to the new cultural shifts and the effects of modernization during this process, which Inglehart refers to as "human empowerment." Rapid economic development in East Asia will hasten the transformation of social structures and boost social engagement, altering the traditional Confucian value system and fostering its fusion with more contemporary attitudes and values, greater tolerance and appreciation for freedom, a greater sense of political efficacy, and the ability of the populace to live democratically (Diamond 1999; Fukuyama 1997; Ma 2007).

Furthermore, unlike the contentious discussion over Asian values, numerous academics have questioned this notion. Some scholars reject the existence of a Confucian value ontology, claiming that features of Confucian values such as family ethics or government provision of basic welfare for the people are not unique to Confucian civilizations (Sen 1997). Some scholars claim that the "Asian values" debate is politically and ideologically driven, particularly because the idea of Asian values is sometimes used as a pretext to sustain the legitimacy of authoritarian rule, which has nothing to do with actual Asian traditions (Inglehart 2000). Others have claimed that Asia is not a unified geographical entity and that a single set of values does not adequately represent the region's cultural traditions (Acharya 2010). Since then, other academics have extended and tested Confucian culture in a variety of dimensions at both empirical and empirical levels. Doh Chull Shin divides Confucian culture into political and social traditions and compares East Asian attitudes toward individualism, hierarchy, egalitarianism, and fatalism with those of other countries, but this study measures Confucian values through a single indicator and compares calculated proportions, which is hardly convincing (Shin and Sin 2012). Shi Tianjian uses a rigorous indicator design to assess Confucian values but only compares Mainland China and Taiwan (Shi 2014). So Young Kim divides Confucian values into four dimensions: familism, communitarianism, authority orientation, and work ethic, and finds that while attitudes toward strong leadership and parental responsibility preferences form differently among East Asians, these four dimensions do not constitute a clear structure of value beliefs in East Asians' minds. Unfortunately, the items chosen for this study were less important, and extracting common core concepts from the same group of things proved difficult (Kim 2010).

In summary, the research mentioned above has made several attempts and efforts to investigate the link between Confucianism and democracy in East Asia, however, there are certain limits.

First, most contemporary research portrays Confucian culture as a unified totality, neglecting the multiple components of Confucian cultural values. Although some researchers recognize that Confucian culture is not a single value and have deconstructed it, the majority of these works remain theoretical analyses (He 2010) or empirical testing with a particular nation (Choi and Woo 2018), and assessing indicators presents significant challenges.

Second, most previous empirical research on the relationship between Confucian culture and democratic values has ignored the function of the political system at the

macro level, and few studies have integrated the macro and micro levels to investigate the relationship between the two. In reality, both individual cultural values and the macro level of the state structure impact people's opinions of democracy in East Asia (Lu 2013). The norms, limitations, and practices that emerge in various national systems differ significantly. Education, the media, and other kinds of political socialization impact individuals' democratic views in democracies by enhancing cognitive ability and imparting the principles of liberty, equality, and justice (Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry 1996). As a result, while the populace of democratized East Asian countries is still steeped in traditional Confucian culture, their concept of democracy will progressively become clearer as political socialization progresses. Authorities in authoritarian nations are more likely to instill Confucian cultural legacy through education and the media to solidify state authority, therefore affecting the public's impression of democracy. It can be observed that the role of Confucian culture varies depending on the institutional framework. Although empirical research has shown that the view that Asian values are incompatible with democracy is unfounded and that the political dimensions of Asian values have gradually lost their influence in democratic societies such as Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, as compared to mainland China, we cannot know whether there are differences in the influence of other dimensions of Confucianism in societies with different political systems (Zhai 2022). However, since this study only focused on four societies, namely Mainland China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, rather than the entire East Asian region, it is difficult to know whether other aspects of Confucian culture have varied relationship consequences in civilizations with various political systems.

Finally, previous studies have assessed people's democratic values by assessing their judgments of core democratic values such as competitive elections and political freedom or their support for democracy. But, as democratization continues to sweep in, worldwide citizens increasingly view "democracy" as a political ideal of freedom and equality (Dalton, Shin, and Jou 2007; Rose 2007). Even in countries with little experience with democratic governance, voters show support for a democratic ideal due to societal expectations. As a result, direct measuring of people's opinions of or support for democracy produces a favorable bias toward "democracy" and is scarcely a reliable indication of democratic principles (Bratton 2010; Chu and Huang 2010).

Based on this, this article examines Confucian culture as a multifaceted value system, adopts a new framework for measuring Confucian values, and investigates the interplay between East Asian democratic values and Confucian culture at both the macro-institutional and micro-cultural levels, thereby methodically illuminating the nuanced relationship between the two.

### **Redefining Confucian values: A new analytical framework**

Confucianism has influenced East Asians' values and worldviews for more than two thousand years, permeating every part of their everyday life. Although Confucian culture has taken varied shapes in many East Asian nations and areas, there are certain universal cultural traits. The Confucian culture's authoritative perspective is the most often and widely employed. For instance, some academics have directly interpreted Confucian values as authoritative orientation (Chan 1999; Ma and Yang 2014;

Morlino, Dressel, and Pelizzo 2011) and measured them in terms of attributes like respect for parents, fulfilling one's parental obligations, bringing pride to one's parents, instilling obedience, providing work guidance, and respect for authority (Dalton and Ong 2005). Even though Confucian culture is not a one-dimensional value system, it should be noted that the authoritarian attitude is a crucial component.

Confucian cultural values are very rich in content, involving many concepts such as the five virtues, the three guidelines, and so on, among which the five virtues refer to the five qualities and virtues advocated by Confucianism, namely, benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trustworthiness, and the three guidelines, the seven proofs, and the eight eyes elaborate on the principles of moral culture. The "Three Guidelines" elaborate on Confucian moral development and cultivation methods. In general, Confucian ideals support respect for core human values, urge people to adjust to family and societal hierarchies for the sake of social peace, and emphasize the growth of individual qualities at the family and society levels. According to Tu Wei-Ming, there are two fundamental subcategories of Confucianism: Confucian political thinking and Confucian personal ethical theory. While the latter is characterized by political paternalism, including benevolent paternalism, obedience to a governmental authority, the supremacy of the state's interests, etc., the former is characterized by social collectivism, which primarily involves the regulation of interpersonal life and the importance of collective order and harmony (Tu 1984). Based on this, several academics have defined the idea and segmented the components of Confucian culture. Confucian values were divided into two categories by Chong-Min Park and Doh Chull Shin: political values, which included three levels of familialism, state moralism, and opposition to anti-politics, and social values, which included four levels of social hierarchy, social harmony, group supremacy, and anti-pluralism (Park and Shin 2006). Confucian culture is described by Joel S. Fetzer and J. Christopher Soper as a moral code that prioritizes societal harmony, social hierarchy, and familial loyalty (Fetzer and Soper 2007). Zhai Yida's research puts them into three dimensions: non-political Confucian family values, social values, and political Confucian political values (Zhai 2017). Although researchers' perspectives differ slightly, Confucian principles may be broadly classified into four dimensions: authoritarianism, familialism, collectivism, and harmoniousness.

### ***The four dimensions of Confucian culture***

#### ***Authoritarianism***

Liberal ideology emphasizes reducing government intrusion in the marketplace in Western nations, but Confucian culture considers the government as an important organization for sustaining human welfare and highlights the necessity of the government's active participation in promoting people's well-being. Shi Tianjian's research shows that perceptions of authority can be categorized as hierarchical and reciprocal, the former believes that the legitimacy of rulers comes from the natural order and that rulers have the right to look after the interests of the people, while the latter believes that the consent of the people is a prerequisite for the legitimacy of the government, that how the regime obtains its power is the basis of its legitimacy, and that when the rulers violate the interests of the people, the people have the right to replace the ruler (Shi

2014). Following his findings, he discovered that people with stronger hierarchical orientations toward authority were more likely to understand democracy in terms of guardianship, a populist form of government, and to believe that the rule of government should be entrusted to people with good intellectual and morals qualities (Shi and Lu 2010). More precisely, such an authoritarian value compels individuals to follow the government, avoid political disagreements and confrontations, and see the government as their own father. Numerous studies have revealed that under the influence of this paradigm, East Asian communities accept authority and lack the pursuit of free rights, which is in direct opposition to Western liberal democratic principles that support popular sovereignty, political equality, and the protection of individual rights (Huang, Chu, and Chang 2013; Lu 2013; Park and Shin 2006). So, we propose the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1.1: Authoritarian values are significantly and negatively correlated with the democratic values of East Asia.*

### **Familialism**

As the fundamental unit of society, the family holds a unique position in Confucian ideology. The interactions of family members are guided by an age and gender hierarchy, in which children are expected to respect and honor their parents, wives are expected to obey and respect their husbands, and the interests of the family are prioritized over the individual's ambitions and needs, who is expected to make self-sacrifices for the good of the family. These family features influence not just the allocation of obligations and role-playing inside the family, but also the national level. Generally speaking, people in Confucian areas would regard the emperor as the son of Heaven and local officials as "parents" (Shin and Sin 2012). As a result, virtues in family relationships are viewed as moral norms guiding the relationship between the ruler and the ruled, and the relationship between the ruler and the subject adheres to patriarchal hierarchical and paternalistic principles, which is in opposition to the concept of democracy, which advocates freedom and equality. According to civic culture theory, the authoritative structure of the family plays a crucial influence in forming individuals' political attitude (Almond and Verba 2015). Several studies have shown that people in East Asia under the influence of Confucianism uphold familial values based on the principle of "family first" and pay less attention to their own rights to freedom and equality, which inhibits their adherence to the values of freedom and democracy (Nathan and Chen 2004; Shin and Sin 2012; Zhai 2017). So, we propose the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1.2: Familial values are significantly and negatively correlated with the democratic values of East Asia.*

### **Collectivism**

Collectivism emphasizes the priority of the communal interest over individual well-being and independence, and believes communitarian principles are preferable in social government. Lee Kuan Yew, who politicized the term "community" and used it to attack liberal claims, said that Asians needed "a society with communitarian values, in which the interests of the community take precedence over the interests of the individual" rather than American-style individualism (Bell 1995). As a result,



collectivist values are sometimes viewed as a “consensus imposing” that aids in the preservation of the “authoritarian system” of East Asian ethos. However, William De Bary contends that the collectivist parts of the Confucian tradition, which encourage freedom and collaboration among autonomous individuals, are consistent with the concept of democracy rather than opposed to it (De Bary 1998). According to Russell A. Fox, collectivism in Confucian culture is a horizontal concept in which each individual asserts his or her role and can participate in a wide range of community activities at different times and places, which helps to mitigate the negative tendency of individualism in Western liberal democracies and to maintain the collective community’s authority (Fox 1997). Furthermore, traditional “sociological” and “village covenant” organizations have contributed to the development of social norms of reciprocity and trust between the State and its citizens by bringing atomized individuals together into a community, thereby increasing public trust in and support for democratic politics (De Bary 1998). So, we propose the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1.3: Collectivist values are significantly and positively correlated with the democratic values of East Asia.*

### **Harmoniousness**

Confucianism aims to create a harmonious moral community for individuals to have happy and fulfilling lives. Early Confucian scholars such as Confucius and Mencius felt that the collapse of political order was the most basic problem in human life, with moral degradation as its primary cause. Confucius and his disciples urged the moral indoctrination of every member of the community to develop a moral community in which people may live selflessly in peace and enjoyment. Their vision of a “common world” was predicated on the premise that humans are fundamentally social beings with moral integrity. As a result, Confucianism considers “harmony” to be the primary criterion for dealing with interpersonal relationships, urging people to avoid disagreement to reduce societal disputes and thereby attain social harmony. Emphasizing collective interests and obedience to social authority, according to Fukuyama, is conducive to the accumulation of social capital required for the development of a democratic society, the maintenance of social stability, and the establishment of a “commonwealth” society of equality and harmony (De Bary 1998; Fukuyama 1995). Relevant empirical studies have also shown that social harmony in Confucian culture assumes individual differences and advocates peaceful coexistence and respect for dissenting views, which is compatible with the tolerance tradition in Western liberal democracy, and thus the value of social harmony does not resist the democratization process (Fetzer and Soper 2007). So, we propose the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1.4: Harmonial values are significantly and positively correlated with the democratic values of East Asia.*

### **Regulatory role of the political system**

In addition, Distinct institutional settings have very different political practices, and institutional change progressively modifies citizens’ political beliefs and actions



through political socialization (Norris 2011). In this process, societies in various institutional forms disseminate universal political norms through the appropriate channels, thereby influencing citizens' political cognition, political emotions, and political attitudes. Individuals acquire knowledge, values, and rules about the political system through learning and practice (Van Deth, Abendschön, and Vollmar 2011). It is clear that the development of democratic cognitive capacity does not occur automatically; rather, it is cultivated and is dependent on a particular institutional setting. Even if a person supports democratic values, the political actions they encounter nonetheless have an impact on how they see democracy.

East Asia has seen a tremendous surge in modernization following decades of strong economic expansion. Rapid industrialization and urbanization have resulted in a dramatic shift in social stratification, from a peasant, soldier, and landowner-dominated traditional society to a modern society dominated by an emerging middle class of white-collar workers, professionals, small and medium-sized business owners, and university students. These newly formed middle classes wanted political engagement, began to criticize authoritarian leadership, and wished for greater democracy. Following the formation of a unified market and the rise of intellectual and entrepreneurial classes in some East Asian societies, the authoritarian political system gradually failed to adapt to changing economic and social conditions, resulting in democratic transition and constitutional reforms. Many authoritarian nations, including South Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan, have begun the process of political liberalization to varied degrees since the mid-1980s. The beginning of the establishment of a pluralistic democratic constitutional system, the transition from military to civilian government, the rapid development of pluralistic politics, the strengthening of the role of the legislature, the President's initiative to cede power or be directly elected by the electorate, and unprecedented political participation of the people and interest groups have all become important symbols of the newly industrialized world's progress.

With East Asia's large-scale political reform and societal modernization, the potential for value shift is considerable. According to institutional learning theory, people's perspectives on democracy are formed via democratic experience (Easton, Dennis, and Easton 1969). As the democratization process in East Asia continues to advance, and in the more democratic East Asian societies where political elites disseminate democratic values through education and propaganda, and where ordinary people's participation in activities such as voting in elections, managing community affairs, and coming into contact with leaders can also have an educational effect, will the continued flourishing of democracy will the likely continued flourishing of democracy will likely diminish the impact of the historical and cultural heritage, and contribute to the development of a new and lasting perception of democracy by the citizenry (Muller and Seligson 1994). Of several studies have found discrepancies in the general population's conceptions of democracy in East Asian cultures with varying political systems. A study by Russell Dalton and Doh Chull Shin, for example, found that the populations of Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, China, where democratization has been more widespread, are more supportive of democracy and more distant from authoritarianism than the populations of two countries, namely, Mongolia and Indonesia, and that a new generation of people socialized after the

democratic transition is more likely to be educated in the political norms of the new democratic regimes (Dalton and Shin 2014). Similarly, Lu Jie's research shows that in liberal democracies such as Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea, democracy as a set of institutions and procedures has been established and gradually strengthened over the last few decades in comparison to authoritarian societies such as those in mainland China and Singapore, to the point where procedures for the protection of fundamental rights and the preservation of liberty and justice have become an important part of the people's conception of democracy (Lu 2013). It follows that in more democratized East Asian societies, the general public is more likely to support democratic values. So, we propose the following research hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 2.1: The degree of democratization is significantly and positively related to the democratic values of East Asia.*

Furthermore, Confucianism is not a fixed variable, and political education in a democracy can mitigate the consequences of traditional anti-democratic culture. According to Marc F. Plattner, democracies foster a greater sense of freedom, which means that while the essence of liberal ideology remains weak in East Asia's newly democratizing countries, liberalism will continue to strengthen and anti-liberal cultural traditions will fade as the third wave spreads (Plattner 1993). As previously stated, among the four dimensions of Confucian culture, authoritarianism requires people to respect authority and unconditionally obey the government, familialism is regarded as the moral norm guiding the relationship between the ruler and the ruled, and the relationship between the ruler and the ministers follows the principles of patriarchal hierarchy and paternalism, which are two cultural values that are contrary to the concepts of democracy, which advocate for equality. The collective orientation and communitarianism of traditional Confucian culture can mitigate the detrimental tendency of individualism in Western liberal democracy, build social capital, and give rise to democratic virtues like as tolerance and collective consciousness. Gerald L. Curtis contends that, while traditional East Asian nations lack a robust civic culture, the process of democratization will produce a civic culture that favors democratic stability (Curtis 2013). Therefore, in the democratizing societies of East Asia, as political learning deepens and ordinary people begin to pursue the realization of self-rights and the acquisition of political power, the authoritarian and familial traditions of Confucianism, which uphold hierarchy, will gradually fail to adapt to the development of democratic politics, and the collective orientation and communitarianism, which are in line with the civil society and social capital required for the development of democracy, will be consolidated. However, in authoritarian states, the authorities frequently use the patriarchal authority of Confucianism to uphold their rule, and strong ideological indoctrination through education to shape the public's perception of democracy (Egorov, Guriev, and Sonin 2009; Lu and Shi 2015), and pervasive media propaganda to restrain the growth of logical and informed citizens to consolidate their power (Qin, Strömberg, and Wu 2017). It has been demonstrated that modernization and democratization have expedited the decline of the political dimension of Asian values in democratic nations such as South Korea, Japan, and

Taiwan, China, where social modernization has resulted in increased support for liberal principles (Zhai 2022). So, we propose the following research hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 2.2: The relationship between Confucian culture and East Asian democratic values varies depending on the degree of democratization.*

*Corollary 2.2.1: At higher levels of democracy, authoritarian and familial values are more weakly related to democratic values.*

*Corollary 2.2.2: At higher levels of democracy, harmonial and collectivist values are more strongly related to democratic values.*

In summary, the research framework of this article is as follows (see [Figure 1](#)).

## **Data, variables, and models**

### **Data sources**

Data for this study were obtained from the Asian Barometer. Since 2001, this research has used social survey techniques to monitor changes in citizens' political beliefs and actions in thirteen East Asian societies. The ABS project, which focuses more on the survey of citizens' opinions toward democracy than other surveys carried out in the area, gives thorough data to support this study. This article uses the fourth wave of survey data and selects six societies for the investigation: Japan, Hong Kong, Korea, China mainland, Singapore, and Taiwan. A valid total sample of 10,262 is used for the study.<sup>2</sup>

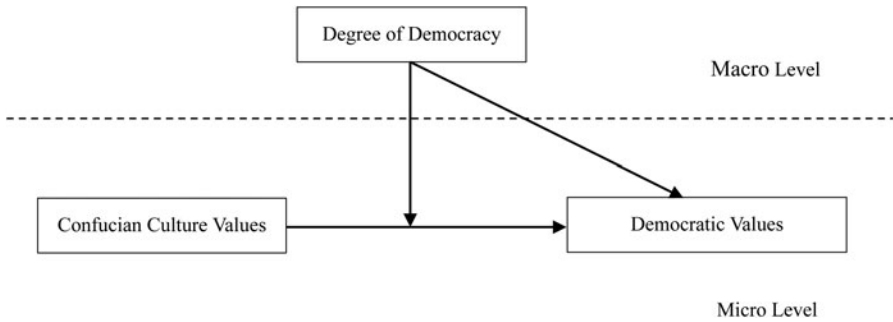
### **Measurements of variables**

In this article, the three main explanatory variables are democratic ideals, Confucian values, and democratic institutions, which are assessed as follows:

#### **Dependent variable: Democratic values**

In terms of cognitive psychology, cognitive ability refers to a person's capacity for logic, planning, problem-solving, abstract thought, and the interpretation of complicated data. A well-defined system of cognitive structures, or some kind of constraint or functional interconnectedness among concepts, awareness, and attitudes, is present in citizens with high cognitive abilities (Converse 1964). This restriction or interconnectedness shows that the many attitudes held by individuals in a certain cognitive area are organized and consistent (Freeze and Montgomery 2016). Therefore, determining the public's cognitive capacity for democracy requires looking at both whether the average citizen can define the concept of democracy clearly and whether they can maintain consistency in backward and forward cognition, or whether they can distinguish between concepts that are either contrary to or alternative to it (McClosky and Brill 1983; McClosky and Zaller 1984; Shin and Kim 2018).

At least a few requirements must be fulfilled for a system to be considered democratic in the proper meaning of the word, including regular open elections, effective participation, equal voting rights, fully informed access, and freedom of assembly and



**Figure 1.** The framework for the analysis of Confucian culture and democratic values.

expression (Dahl 2008). To do this, the elected government must be able to retain its autonomy, which results from the public's acceptance of the elected regime's authority and is independent of other social groupings, organizations, and persons. The legitimacy of the elected government is weakened whenever other organizations or citizens, such as authorities or other state officials, challenge its authority (Philippe and Karl 1991). To maintain the integrity of political competition and participation, democratic institutions also require a certain level of civil political freedom, freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and freedom of association. A system can only be referred to as a democracy if it allows for free and fair elections and political freedom, and it cannot be called a democracy if it attempts to give authority over state management and governmental decision-making to a person or group with authoritarian leadership.

Using this information as a foundation, we evaluated respondents' support for "competitive elections" and "freedom toward the press" as measures of their attitudes toward democracy. We also assessed respondents' agreement with comments like "leadership dictatorship" and "military control" to gauge their opposition to non-democratic governments. The four questions were added together to create a variable with a range of  $-4$  (all wrong answers) to  $4$  (all questions answered correctly). Higher scores indicate stronger democratic values, and this coding gives a clear and straightforward picture of each person's scores on each of the four democratic cognitive principles.

### *Micro-Level Independent Variables: Confucian Cultural Values*

Confucian cultural values are the explanatory variable in this article. As previously said, Confucian cultural principles include primarily authoritarianism, familialism, collectivism, and harmoniousness. Authoritarianism encompasses political harmony, paternalism, obedience to a government authority, and the primacy of the state's interests. Harmoniousness focuses on the pursuit of social harmony; Collectivism emphasizes the priority of collective interests over individual interests and obedience to social authority, and familialism encompasses family hierarchy and the supremacy of family interests over individual interests. As a result, this article chooses indicators such as family interests over individual interests, children should obey their parents'

demands, wives should listen to their mothers-in-law, individual interests should be secondary to collective interests, conflicts with others should be avoided in society, government leaders are like extended family parents, the government determines the circulation of social opinions, and social groups can affect local stability and extroversion (see Table 1).

### *Macro-level independent variable: Democracy Index*

The Economist's Democracy Index gauges the level of democracy in the majority of nations and regions worldwide. Compared to other democracy indices, the index includes five indicators: political participation, political culture, the electoral process and diversity, government operations, and civil liberties. It is divided into four categories: "full democracy" (8–10), "partial democracy" (6–7.9), "mixed government" (4–5.9 points), and "autocracy" (less than 4 points), and it gives a clearer and more thorough definition of the level of democratization in It should be noted that there is still some debate on how each society is ranked in terms of democracy according to the Objective Democracy Index, but in the lack of a more accurate indicator,<sup>3</sup> this article continues to utilize this indicator for analysis.

### *Control variables*

According to modernization theory and post-modernization theory, social and economic modernization enhances the population's modern values through increased social mobility, improved public education, increased public involvement in economic activities, and cognitive mobilization brought about by mass media, thereby raising the population's level of democratic values (Lipset 1959). Therefore, in this article, indicators such as media exposure, household income, education level, generation, and gender were selected as control variables. Media exposure was measured by asking respondents how often they watch and read political news, and was assigned a value of 1–5, with higher numbers indicating higher media exposure; household income was measured by asking respondents' subjective assessment of their household income and expenditure, and was assigned a value of 1–3, with higher numbers indicating higher subjective economic levels; education level was a fixed-order variable of 1–4, representing "elementary school and below," "junior high school," "high school," and "bachelor's degree and above." Generations are categorized according to the year of birth of the respondents into "before the 40s," "50s–60s," and "70s–80s," and gender is a dummy variable that includes both males and females. In addition, considering that the economic level (Inglehart and Welzel 2010; Lipset 1959) may have some influence on individuals' democratic values, this article includes control variables such as GDP per capita.

Table 2 displays descriptive statistics for the factors of interest.

### *Research model*

Utilizing multilevel linear regression analysis, we examine the aforementioned study hypotheses. The usage of multilevel models in comparative political science is growing because multilevel linear regression analysis not only evaluates cross-level

**Table 1.** Factor loadings of Confucian cultural values (N = 10262)

Index	Authoritarianism	Harmoniousness	Collectivism	Familialism
Q55 For the sake of the family, the individual should put his interests second.	0.0385	<b>0.665</b>	0.1183	0.0648
Q56 In a group, we should sacrifice our interests for the sake of the group's collective interest.	0.2492	<b>0.678</b>	0.0844	0.1621
Q57 For the sake of national interest, the individual interest could be sacrificed.	0.4169	<b>0.5911</b>	0.0313	0.1657
Q58 When dealing with others, developing a long-term relationship is more important than securing one's immediate interest.	-0.0412	<b>0.6743</b>	0.2645	-0.0371
Q59 When dealing with others, one should not only focus on immediate interest but also plan for the future.	-0.0684	<b>0.6178</b>	0.3734	-0.1017
Q60 Even if parents' demands are unreasonable, children still should do what they ask.	0.1232	0.1822	0.0626	<b>0.6282</b>
Q61 When a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law come into conflict, even if the mother-in-law is in the wrong, the husband should still persuade his wife to obey his mother.	0.2431	0.1738	0.0633	<b>0.6304</b>
Q62 As a student, you should not question the authority of your teacher.	<b>0.3378</b>	0.0647	0.3597	0.465
Q63 In a group, we should avoid open quarrels to preserve the harmony of the group.	0.0414	0.0585	<b>0.5727</b>	0.319
Q64 Even if there is some disagreement with others, one should avoid the conflict.	0.1214	-0.0984	0.1048	<b>0.6558</b>
Q65 A person should not insist on his own opinion if his co-workers disagree with him.	0.0793	-0.0377	0.019	<b>0.6297</b>
Q66 A person is destined to be rich or poor, successful or unsuccessful.	<b>0.7629</b>	0.1132	0.0788	0.1573
Q67 If you only need one child, it is better to have a son than a daughter.	<b>0.768</b>	0.0162	0.0811	0.156
Q68 When interacting with people, you should not focus too much on momentary gains and losses.	<b>0.5643</b>	-0.0225	0.3206	-0.1225

Q142 Government leaders are like the head of a family; we should all follow their decisions.	<b>0.645</b>	0.12	0.0403	0.1736
Q143 The government should decide whether certain ideas should be allowed to be discussed in society.	<b>0.3378</b>	0.0647	0.3597	0.465
Q144 Harmony of the community will be disrupted if people organize lots of groups.	0.1584	0.2059	<b>0.7267</b>	0.0773
Q147 If we have political leaders who are morally upright, we can let them decide everything.	0.215	0.1566	<b>0.7297</b>	0.0825

Note: The original question is “We would like to know your opinion on the following statements, do you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree?,” the reverse assignment value is 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = agree; 4 = strongly agree, the larger the value, the higher the degree of agreement. KMO and Bartlett’s test using principal components analysis: 0.8566,  $p < 0.001$ . 50.8% contribution to variance.



**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics of variables

Variables	Sample	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
<i>Democracy Value</i>	7777	3.0	0.967	0	4
<i>Authoritarianism</i>	6680	0	1	-1.72	0.84
<i>Collectivism</i>	6680	0	1	-3.75	1.29
<i>Harmoniousness</i>	6680	0	1	-1.83	1.35
<i>Familialism</i>	6680	0	1	-4.27	4.06
<i>Democracy Index</i>	6	5.24	1	2.26	8
<i>Income</i>	9756	1.99	0.72	1	3
<i>Generations</i>	10237	2.39	0.87	1	4
<i>Education</i>	10213	2.59	1.17	1	4
<i>Media</i>	10144	3.48	1.50	1	5
<i>Sex</i>	10262	0.48	0.50	0	1
<i>GDP per capita</i>	6	10.0	0.70	9.22	11.07

interactions of variables between different levels but also reliably assesses the connection between variables at various levels. The following are the specific models.

#### Level 1: Micro Level Models

$$\begin{aligned}
 y_{ij} = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Income}_{ij} + \beta_2 \text{Generations}_{ij} + \beta_3 \text{Media}_{ij} \\
 & + \beta_4 \text{Education}_{ij} + \beta_5 \text{Authoritarianism}_{ij} + \beta_6 \text{Collectivism}_{ij} \\
 & + \beta_7 \text{Harmoniousness}_{ij} + \beta_7 \text{Familialism}_{ij} + \beta_8 X_{ij}
 \end{aligned}$$

#### Layer 2: Macro Level Models

$$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_0 + \gamma_1 \text{Democracy}_j + \gamma_2 \text{GDP}_j + \mu$$

However, because there are only six societies in this study's second stratum, it is difficult to meet the model's minimum sample size of thirty groups, which can easily lead to a large estimation bias in the maximum likelihood (ML) method in the multilevel linear regression analysis, resulting in a spurious statistically significant test (Maas and Hox 2005). To prevent possible bias, we use a hierarchical way of adding explanatory factors, that is, each regression adds just one cultural values variable at the individual level and the democracy index variable at the national level. After executing the stratified linear regression, we employ limited maximum likelihood estimation (REML) to robustly test the analytical outcomes. The restricted maximum likelihood (REML) technique is a subset of maximum likelihood estimation that employs a likelihood function generated from a modified set of data rather than the maximum likelihood fit of all information. When the sample size of the second stratum is small, the constrained maximum likelihood technique yields unbiased

estimates of the variance and covariance parameters, according to previous research (McNeish and Stapleton 2016).

## Data analysis and results

### *Descriptive statistics*

Table 3 demonstrates that people in East Asia have varying levels of views of democratic and non-democratic institutional features. East Asians are far more likely to view “competitive elections” (79.6%) as a quality of democratic institutions than “Press Freedom” (56.5%). Taiwan has the highest percentage of East Asians who think that citizens should choose government officials through competitive elections (competitive elections), while Singapore has the lowest percentage (68.6%). People in mainland China are least aware of this, with just 39.8 percent of the populace supporting press freedom. In contrast, the largest percentage of people in Japan (73.9%) think that the media should have the ability to report news and express ideas. In terms of opinions of non-democratic institution qualities, the number of individuals who oppose “strong leaders should be permitted to make choices” (80.3%) is somewhat lower than the proportion who believe “the military should dominate the country” (84.2%). The percentages of people who reject a dictatorship and military control are highest in Japan, at 92.2 percent and 97.3 percent, respectively, while the percentages of people who oppose a dictatorship and military rule are lowest in mainland China, at 28.2 percent and 69.0 percent, respectively.

As previously stated, a democratic cognitive population should be able to accurately recognize the core qualities of a democracy while rejecting the traits of a non-democracy, therefore we calculated the proportion of persons who could correctly answer all four questions. According to the findings, just 39.1 percent of East Asians can recognize both the essential characteristics of democracy and reject the characteristics of an authoritarian state (all four questions correctly). Japan has the biggest number of individuals (57.0%), followed by South Korea (48.2%), while Mainland China has the lowest proportion (21.5%). Further statistics revealed that the mean value of democracy values of East Asia was 3.0, with people’s democratic perception ability being stronger in Japan, Hong Kong, China, South Korea, and Taiwan, China, and weaker in Mainland China, and Singapore (see Table 3).

Furthermore, we have created a tangible image of Confucian cultural values in each East Asian societies. Figure 2 depicts the profile of Confucian cultural values maintained by the inhabitants of various nations or areas. In terms of authoritarian values, Hong Kong, China has the strongest, followed by Japan, and mainland China has the weakest. In terms of collectivist values, Hong Kong, China has the strongest, followed by Japan, and mainland China has the weakest and in terms of harmonial values, Korea and Hong Kong have the strongest, while Japan has the weakest. In terms of familial values, Korea has the lowest, whereas Japan and Hong Kong have higher familial values (see Figure 2).

### *Regression analysis of Confucian cultural values and democratic values*

Six multi-level regression models were created to investigate the relationship between various levels of Confucian cultural factors and the democratic values of East Asian. The

**Table 3.** Popular Democratic Values in East Asian Societies

	Democratic Regimes		Non-Democratic Regimes		Answer all four questions correctly (%)	Mean
	Press Freedom (%)	Competitive Election (%)	Leadership Dictatorship (%)	Military Dictatorship (%)		
Japan	73.9	82.6	92.2	97.3	57.0	3.4
Hong Kong	73.4	76.7	85.9	94.4	52.5	3.3
South Korea	67.2	78.4	86.0	90.8	48.2	3.2
China	39.8	80.9	28.2	69.0	21.5	2.7
Singapore	57.0	68.6	76.3	81.9	34.9	2.8
Taiwan	59.7	84.4	91.2	95.9	46.4	3.2
Total proportion	56.5	79.6	80.3	84.2	39.1	3.0

Note: The percentage of competitive elections and press freedom refers to the proportion of respondents who support competitive elections and press freedom in the total number of respondents in the country/region; leading dictatorship and military dictatorship refer to the proportion of respondents who reject leading dictatorship and military rule. Respondents accounted for the total number of respondents in the country; answering all four questions correctly refers to the proportion of total respondents who support competitive elections and press freedom while rejecting dictatorship and military rule.

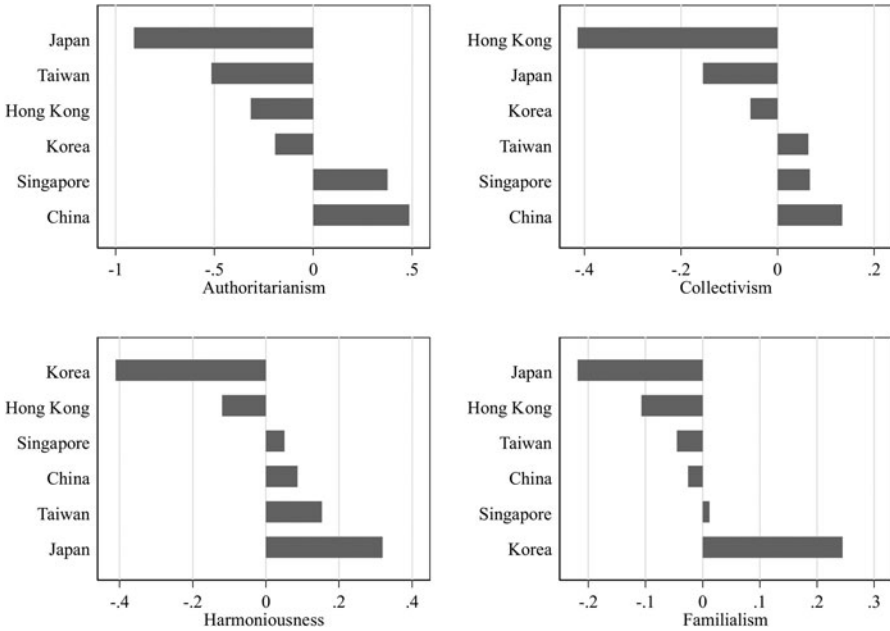


Figure 2. East Asia's Confucian values.

models' dependent variable was the East Asian population's democratic values, and the explanatory variables at the individual level were primarily Confucian cultural values of authoritarianism, familism, collectivism, and harmoniousness, at the country level, the explanatory variable was the democracy index, and the control variables included the household income, generation, education, media exposure, gender, and GDP per capita (see Table 4). To avoid the problem of multicollinearity in the model, this article uses the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) to test the results showing that the VIF value of each variable is less than 3, and there is no multicollinearity situation.

Model 1 is null. Random intercept analysis of variance (ANOVA) can be used to assess whether differences in the dependent variable are explained by differences between countries and hence the need for multilevel regression modeling. The intra-group correlation (ICC) is the ratio of variance, which is the proportion of between-country variation (random component) to the total variance (random and fixed components). When  $ICC > 0.059$  implies that between-group differences exist a multilevel regression model should be constructed to test this. The results show that the ICC value is 0.062 ( $>0.059$ ), which indicates that there are differences in democratic cognitive ability at the country and individual levels that ignoring this stratification structure would produce inaccurate inferences, and that it is reasonable to build a multilevel regression model in this article.

The regression model with control variables is referred to as Model 2. Household income and gender had no significant effect on people's democratic cognitive ability, whereas education level, media exposure, and generation were all positively related to

**Table 4** Fitting results of the multilevel linear regression model on the democratic values of East Asian

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Micro level variable						
Authoritarianism			-0.270*** (0.0136)	-0.269*** (0.0136)	-0.268*** (0.0136)	-0.280*** (0.0134)
Collectivism				0.00493 (0.0120)	0.00551 (0.0120)	0.00299 (0.0119)
Harmoniousness					0.0294** (0.0122)	0.0263** (0.0121)
Familialism						-0.149*** (0.0125)
Family income		0.0184 (0.0154)	0.0141 (0.0159)	0.0141 (0.0173)	0.0127 (0.0173)	0.00395 (0.0171)
Generation		0.0335** (0.0144)	0.0136 (0.0150)	0.00254 (0.0163)	0.00567 (0.0164)	-0.0188 (0.0163)
Education		0.141*** (0.0119)	0.132*** (0.0124)	0.104*** (0.0134)	0.105*** (0.0134)	0.0787*** (0.0134)
Media use		0.0171** (0.00797)	0.0170** (0.00824)	0.0115 (0.00886)	0.0109 (0.00887)	0.00921 (0.00875)
Gender		0.0224 (0.0213)	0.0369* (0.0222)	0.0225 (0.0239)	0.0236 (0.0239)	0.0516** (0.0237)

Macro level variables						
Democracy Index			0.0790***	0.0267	0.0275	0.0314**
			(0.0271)	(0.0165)	(0.0170)	(0.0140)
GDP per capita		0.130	0.000622	0.00118	0.00145	-0.00547
		(0.140)	(0.0657)	(0.0663)	(0.0675)	(0.0561)
Constant	3.114***	2.464***	2.173***	2.515***	2.503***	2.624***
	(0.0983)	(0.215)	(0.182)	(0.120)	(0.123)	(0.106)
Var ( $\mu$ )	0.06	0.05	0.005	0.005	0.005	0.003
Var ( $\epsilon$ )	0.87	0.83	0.80	0.80	0.80	0.80
Observations	7777	7424	5738	5738	5738	5738
Number of groups	6	6	6	6	6	6

Note: \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \* $p < 0.05$ , Standardized coefficients, standard errors in parentheses.

people's democratic cognitive ability, i.e. the higher the education level, the more frequent the media exposure, and the older the generation, the greater East Asian people's democratic cognitive ability. The macro-level GDP per capita, on the other hand, has no significant effect on the democratic values.

On top of the control variables, Models 3-Model 6 incorporate the individual-level Confucian values of authoritarianism, familialism, collectivism, and harmonization, as well as the national-level democracy index variables. As shown in [Table 4](#), Different dimensions of Confucian cultural values relate differently to the democratic values of East Asian. Authoritarian values such as recognizing family interests over individual interests, family or political hierarchy, patriarchy, and obedience to government authority, as well as familial values, have a significant negative correlation with people's democratic values, and Hypotheses 1.1 and 1.2 are confirmed. Contrary to the findings of established empirical studies, Confucian collectivist values do not have a significant correlation with the democratic values of the population, and Hypothesis 1.3 could not be confirmed, whereas harmonial values have a significant positive correlation with people's democratic values, and Hypothesis 1.4 is confirmed. This demonstrates how different aspects of Confucian culture relate to democratic ideas in different ways. On the one hand, East Asian societies have formed a deep-rooted humanistic and powerful society, where individuals' rights are restricted not only by blood and identity-based interpersonal relationships, but also by the power structure of governments, enterprises, and social groups, and the hierarchical Confucian authoritarian and familial culture suppresses individuality and hinders development. On the other hand, as some theorists have argued, the emphasis on social harmony in Confucian culture can increase the East Asian populace's social tolerance and is conducive to the accumulation of social capital required for the development of a democratic society, which has a role to play in enhancing the populace's democratic values (Fetzer and Soper 2007; Fukuyama 1995).

Furthermore, the degree of democratization at the national level has a substantial positive link with population democratic values, and Hypothesis 2.1 is confirmed. This is that because individuals' democratic principles are shaped by the political and social milieu in which they live. The political socialization system in East Asia is divided into several political socialization institutions, such as families, schools, religious organizations, workplaces, and mass media, which interpret and transmit information about democratic political development from their perspectives to the public. Individuals in these more democratized East Asian societies learn the new norms and behaviors of the democratic political system over a longer period through the media, education, and so on, and the groups holding old ideas are gradually replaced by the new generation, resulting in more systematic and profound democratic values of the people.

Due to the limitations of multilayer linear regression on the number of stratified samples, the sample of societies in the second stratum of this article is only six, making it difficult to meet the minimum limit of the sample size of this regression model, which may easily lead to some bias in the regression results. As a result, this research uses the limited maximum likelihood approach (REML) to assess the model's robustness. Also, robustness tests were carried out by substituting the independent and dependent variables. The findings reveal that the explanatory variable coefficients



in the regression models of the three approaches are typically compatible with the original model, and the regression results of the model in this work are rather resilient (see Appendix Table 6).

### *The interaction effect between the degree of democracy and Confucian cultural values*

We created four models to examine cross-level interaction effects between the state level and the person level in order to determine if institutional variables moderate the association between Confucian cultural values and democratic values. Models 7–10 are statistical models that combine Confucian authoritarianism, collectivism, harmoniousness, and familism with the index of democracy, in that order (see Table 5).

When the interaction term between authoritarianism and democracy index is included, Model 7 shows that authoritarianism is negatively related to democratic values and democracy index is significantly positively related to democratic values, but the interaction term between the two is not statistically significant. This suggests that the relationship between authoritarian values and the democratic values of the East Asian population will not change regardless of the degree of democratization. Similarly, Model 10 data suggest that the interaction term between familial values and the democracy index is not statistically significant, Corollary 2.2.1 cannot be verified.

Model 8 reveals a substantial negative link between collectivist values and democratic values, a significant positive association between the democracy index and democratic values, and a significant positive relationship between the two interaction terms. This suggests that at higher democratic levels, there is a stronger negative association between East Asian democratic values and collectivist values. When a positive and statistically significant coefficient on the interaction term between Confucian harmonial values and the democracy index is added to Model 9, harmonial values are negatively correlated with democratic values, and the democracy index is significantly positively correlated with democratic values. The function of Confucian harmonial values in promoting democratic principles varies with different national systems, and the more democratized the East Asian societies, the stronger the reinforcing influence of harmonial values, Corollary 2.2.2 is verified.

We displayed the marginal impacts of two interaction terms, collectivist values and degree of democracy, and harmonial values and degree of democracy, based on Models 8 and 9, respectively, to further understand the interaction term effects (see Figure 3). As seen in the left panel of Figure 3, when the Democracy Index is more than 5.8, the positive correlation between Confucian harmonial values and the democratic values of the East Asian population is stronger at higher levels of democracy. As seen in the right panel of Figure 3, when the democracy index is lower than 3.8, the negative correlation between Confucian collectivist values and the democratic values of the East Asian population is stronger at higher levels of democracy.

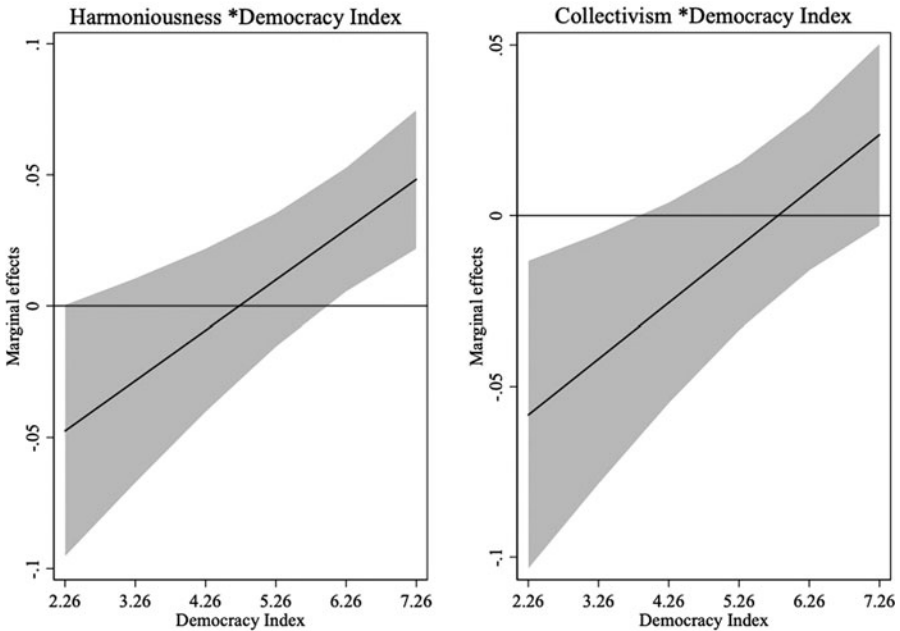
According to Almond and Verba (2015), institutional innovation should be founded on a cultural basis, and foreign cultural aspects are difficult to immediately transplant into the new political system, and must instead be modified and absorbed via the roots of their cultural traditions. In the last few decades, Japan, South Korea,

**Table 5.** Fitting results of the multi-level linear regression model for the interaction effect of democratic values

	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10
Micro level variable				
Authoritarianism	−0.318*** (0.0358)	−0.277*** (0.0135)	−0.281*** (0.0134)	−0.281*** (0.0134)
Collectivism	0.00422 (0.0119)	−0.0954*** (0.0338)	0.00295 (0.0119)	0.00292 (0.0119)
Harmoniousness	0.0257** (0.0121)	0.0261** (0.0121)	−0.0879** (0.0358)	0.0254** (0.0121)
Familyism	−0.149*** (0.0125)	−0.150*** (0.0125)	−0.153*** (0.0126)	−0.169*** (0.0310)
Macro level variables				
Democracy Index	0.0315** (0.0135)	0.0313** (0.0138)	0.0305** (0.0147)	0.0316** (0.0139)
Control variables	T	T	T	T
Interaction effects				
Authoritarianism*	0.00640 (0.00566)			
Democracy Index		0.0164*** (0.00527)		
Collectivism*			0.0186*** (0.00549)	
Democracy Index				0.00343 (0.00499)
Familyism*				0.00343 (0.00499)
Democracy Index				
Constant	2.641*** (0.105)	2.637*** (0.105)	2.627*** (0.110)	2.626*** (0.106)
Observations	5738	5738	5738	5738
Number of groups	6	6	6	6

Note: \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \* $p < 0.05$ , Standardized coefficients, standard errors in parentheses.

and Taiwan, China have pursued democratic systems with institutional forms, elements, and priorities that are unique to the region, and consolidating the emerging democratic system has become an important task for democratic societies in East Asia in the process of institutional innovation. Confucian culture puts forward a series of moral codes to promote social harmony, such as benevolence, righteousness, and propriety, and emphasizes the ideal state of harmonious coexistence between human beings, between human beings and society, between human beings and nature, as well as between different countries, while calling for a high degree of



**Figure 3.** Marginal Effects of Democracy Index and Harmonious and Collectivist Values (95% Confidence Interval).

individual responsibility, obligation and sense of duty, based on intrinsic values such as virtue and ability, and linking the value of an individual's life with the common value of the social group. These moral traditions are compatible with a culture of tolerance, trustworthiness, and mutual compromise and collaboration, all of which encourage democratic progress. To consolidate their countries' democratic political development, the political elites of more democratized East Asian societies, such as Japan and South Korea, are more likely to use the traditional Confucian culture of harmony and collectivism to develop a democratic political culture, raising people's democratic awareness and consolidating the development of democracy in their countries.

### Discussion and conclusion

The contentious debates over "Asian values" revolve around the applicability or compatibility of Confucianism and liberal democracy in East Asia, and there is a simple dichotomy between the compatibility or incompatibility of Confucian cultural values with democracy, the logic behind which tends to treat Confucian culture as a homogeneous whole, ignoring the complex relationship between Confucianism and democracy. By viewing Confucian culture as a cultural value system that encompasses two levels of personal and political ethics and classifying them into four dimensions—authoritarianism, familialism, collectivism, and harmoniousness—this article investigates the relationship between Confucian culture and the democratic values of the East Asian populace. It then investigates the role of the macro-political system in

this context. The findings indicate that the East Asian population's democratic principles and several aspects of Confucian cultural values—authoritarianism, familism, collectivism, and harmoniousness—have diverse relationships. Harmonial values have a significant positive impact on democratic values, collectivism values have no bearing on East Asian people's democratic values, and the values of familism and authoritarianism, which are central to Confucian culture, are significantly and negatively correlated with democratic values. This finding demonstrates that "Asian values" (Confucian cultural values) are not and should not be viewed as a single value system, that some Confucian cultural values suppress support for Western liberal and democratic ideas, while others go hand in hand with the concept of democracy and freedom, and that Confucianism is not a culture that cannot coexist with Western political democracy. Confucianism is not an incompatible cultural form with Western political democracy.

Additionally, the study presented in this article indicates the mechanism via which macro-level political systems function, namely, that the link between democratic values and Confucian culture differs based on the particular political system. Both democracies and authoritarian regimes exhibit the same negative link between familial and authoritarian values and democratic values, although different political systems exhibit different relationships between harmonial and collectivist values and democratic values. The positive relationship between East Asian populations' democratic values and harmonial values is more pronounced at higher degrees of democracy, namely when the democracy index is more than 5.8. The negative relationship between East Asian democratic values and collectivist values is more pronounced at greater democratic levels when the democracy score is less than 3.8. It is evident that different political systems have distinct relationships between democratic values and Confucian culture. The political structure is crucial in shaping the character of Confucianism and the means through which it exerts influence.

This article also has several drawbacks. First, the conceptualization of Confucian cultural values and democratic values has been a contentious topic, and while we used a comprehensive measure of Confucian culture from the social to the political dimensions, there may be differences of opinion on the division of Confucian cultural values into dimensions because abstract cultural values are difficult to define and accurately measure. Additionally, owing to data limitations, the selection of indicators in this work is primarily restricted to the procedural and freedom aspects of democracy, and further research in the context of other dimensions of democracy should be examined. Second, the data utilized in this study are cross-sectional, and as contemporary cultures continue to develop, East Asian people's perspectives may change; consequently, future longitudinal studies that evaluate changes in people's attitudes are of considerable theoretical importance.

**Conflict of Interest.** The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this article.

## Notes

1. In the 1990s, Singaporean leader Lee Kuan Yew popularized the concept of Asian values. He claimed that the region's distinct political and economic development was shaped by the Asian value system, which includes good governance, familial values, and respect for authority, and that the political value

gap between the Eastern and Western worlds was rooted in this system. The rich Confucian cultural traditions of Asia may significantly contribute to the development of the world's population, according to Kim Dae Jung and others who have openly questioned this viewpoint in the past. Asian ideals and Confucian principles are frequently compared. See Emmerson 1995; Jung 1994; Subramaniam 2000. .

2. The sample of Vietnam was excluded from this paper due to the lack of indicators related to "Leadership Dictatorship" and "Military Dictatorship" in the ABS4 questionnaire. The sample sizes of the remaining societies are as follows: Japan 1081, Hong Kong, China mainland 1217, South Korea 1200, Mainland China 4068, Taiwan 1657, and Singapore 1039.

3. Many scholars have noted that the measurement and evaluation system of the objective democracy index is largely based on Western liberal democracy as the evaluation standard and that the measurement method, dimension selection, and indicator design are subjective, one-sided, and ideologically biased. As a result, democracy in developing countries is frequently viewed through a distorted lens. See Beetham 2004; Munck and Verkuilen 2002.

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## Appendix

**Table 6.** Robustness test of the regression model of East Asian citizens' democratic value

	Model 11 (REML)	Model 12 (replace the argument)	Model 13 (replace the dependent variable)
Micro level variable			
Authoritarianism	-0.279*** (0.0135)	-0.507*** (0.0290)	-0.288*** (0.0137)
Collectivism	0.00371 (0.0119)	0.0122 (0.0301)	-0.00820 (0.0121)
Harmoniousness	0.0272** (0.0121)	0.203*** (0.0311)	0.0140 (0.0123)
Familialism	-0.149*** (0.0126)	-0.210*** (0.0264)	-0.126*** (0.0127)
Macro level variables			
Democracy Index	0.0305 (0.0213)	0.0389** (0.0153)	0.0812*** (0.0144)
Control variable	T	T	T
Constant	2.628*** (0.149)	3.637*** (0.160)	2.201*** (0.109)
Var ( $\mu$ )	0.22	0.14	0.05
Var ( $\epsilon$ )	3.29	3.31	2.12
Observations	5738	5738	5723
Number of groups	6	6	6

Note: \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \* $p < 0.05$ , Standardized coefficients, standard errors in parentheses.

Independent variable replacement method: In the previous article, the four factors of authoritarianism, familialism, collectivism, and harmoniousness were extracted through factor analysis for regression analysis. In this article, the indicators measuring these four values are summed and averaged for robustness testing.

Dependent variable replacement method: In the previous article, two indicators of democratic regimes, namely competitive elections and freedom of the press, and two indicators of non-democratic regimes, leadership dictatorship, and military dictatorship, were selected as indicators to measure the cognitive ability of democracy. Due to the limitation of questionnaire data, this article measures democracy the processing method of the indicators of regime is the same as above, and one-party rule and expert decision-making are selected as the indicators of non-democratic regimes. The original question is Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statement? A should only allow one political party to be in power; B should allow experts to make decisions, without the need for people's congresses and elections. Choose "strongly agree" and "agree" as -1, choose "disagree" and "strongly disagree" as 1, and choose "don't know/don't answer" as 0. The value of democratic values is the sum of the 4 questions. The larger the value, the stronger the democratic values.

**Minxuan Huang** is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the School of Social Sciences at Tsinghua University. Her research interests include comparative politics, political psychology, political communication, and the Chinese political system.

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